



following Jesus to the Cross

31-DAY EASTER DEVOTIONAL



Allegheny Center
ALLIANCE CHURCH
following Jesus in diverse community

WORSHIP GROW SERVE SHARE

INTRODUCTION

Dear ACAC Congregants,

Each of these 31 devotionals was prepared by a member of the Ministry Team at ACAC. Ministry Team is a team of about 30 leaders that include Pastor Rock, our 3 Administrative Pastors, and all those who direct a ministry at our church. Ministry Team meets once a week to share ministry ideas and direction. It is our hope that you will hear our hearts in each of these devotions written to begin on March 1 and complete on March 31, Easter Sunday.

*We want to encourage you to read the full scripture listed on each devotional in addition to the devotional reading. Nothing will bless you more than getting into God's word on a daily basis. The scriptures were chosen to help all of us **Follow Jesus to the Cross**. May the Lord bless you as you set this time apart for Him.*

Ministry Team

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The Words of the Prophet

READ

Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12

KEY VERSE

“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (ISAIAH 53:6)

DEVOTIONAL

Of the suffering servant, Isaiah says,

1. His appearance was disfigured and marred. Almost unrecognizable. We would have been appalled to look at Him.
2. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him.
He was actually despised.
3. He took up our infirmities and sorrows and He was afflicted by God.
4. He was pierced for our iniquities and was led like a lamb to the slaughter.
5. He was silent before His accusers.
6. He was assigned a grave with the wicked but was buried in a rich man’s grave.
7. He had done nothing to deserve this punishment.
8. He made intercession for the transgressors.

As I looked at commentary for this passage, I was amazed to discover how the Jews try to suggest the suffering servant is the Jewish race—rather than Jesus Christ. But when I read it, I see these very details fulfilled in the crucifixion. It sends chills through



by Karen Dillaman

me to think the words were penned 700 years before the fulfillment. There is no way Isaiah would have known these details unless he first heard from God. Fulfilled prophecy such as this gives me trust and confidence in the inspired word of God.

I also can't help but think about the extreme sacrifice that was made. Satan unleashed every cruelty possible in his desire to destroy the human race. Christ was beaten and tortured and spit upon until the last vestiges of His beauty were gone. Many kings want to be worshiped as gods, but here was Jesus willing to die for me in what must be one of the most painful, torturous ways to die. He wasn't just any man; He was God. His provision is a priceless gift. As we make our journey toward the cross, may the words that lead us there fill you with hope.

PRAYER SUGGESTION

God, You sent Your Son despite the fact You knew what men would do to Him. You set Your plan in place before Adam and Eve sinned. You knew the end from the beginning. And You told the plan to Isaiah so we may read it today and have confidence what You say in Your word You will do. Your sacrifice means heaven for all eternity for me. I want You to know that I am grateful.

NOTES

Good Questions, Good Answers

READ

John 3

KEY VERSE

“Jesus answered, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God, unless he is born of water and the Spirit.’” (JOHN 3:5)

DEVOTIONAL

Someone once said that quality questions lead to a quality life. If that’s the case, our friend Nicodemus in John 3 must have had a wonderful life. Here was a high-ranking official in Israel, a member of the Jewish Senate no less, who decided to pay a nighttime visit to Jesus. Why did he go at night? We aren’t really sure, but we can surmise that Jesus was controversial, and a man of Nicodemus’ position did not get where he was by taking chances. He had meticulously followed the rules and was now at the top of his world. The problem was that he was sensing that the top of his world wasn’t the top of God’s world, so he decided to investigate Jesus’ teaching and claims with a little attention.

So what did Nicodemus do when he got to Jesus? He asked him questions, good questions, and Jesus asked him questions in return, and what resulted was a rich time of “seeking the Lord.” We aren’t ever sure what happened to Nicodemus, but all indications point to the fact that he became a disciple of Jesus.

Are you happy with your spiritual life? You may be at the top of your world, whether in church, business, or community, but there’s something missing. The only way to find what’s missing is to



by John Stanko

investigate and that means you have to ask God questions—questions about your heart, life, attitudes, and future. Sometimes you can seek the Lord and ask Him questions by seeking out those who know Him and have a reputation for wisdom, just like Nicodemus did. Or it may be that you fast and pray directly to God, asking Him for answers, waiting with pen and paper to record what you think He may be trying to tell you.

As you begin this season leading to Easter, I trust you will spend some time evaluating your spiritual walk, journey, and condition. This path will lead you right to where you need to be—at the cross of Jesus, where you will realize your need for resurrection life and power. Don't be discouraged if you confront some issues or heart conditions that need changed or eliminated from your life. That's what Nicodemus had to face. He had some 'bad' thinking and Jesus gave him some better ways to think and approach his walk with the Lord. That same thing will happen to you, but only if you have the courage to ask good questions and the faith to trust that God will answer, whether through His Word, His people, or His Spirit.

PRAYER SUGGESTION

I ask that You answer my questions, Lord, about my spiritual condition. I want to know the reality of where I am and where You want me to be. I will keep asking in faith and I trust that You will provide all the answers I need. Amen.

NOTES

Seeking for All the Wrong Reasons

READ

John 6:25 – 59

KEY VERSE

“Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.” (JOHN 6:26)

DEVOTIONAL

People have a habit of seeking Jesus for all the wrong reasons! Some seek Him desiring relief from a negative situation, such as a failing marriage, poverty, unemployment, or incarceration. Others desire healing from physical or emotional distress. Some seek Him wanting His assistance in securing a spouse. Others desire His protection for their nation or way of life. Some seek Him thirsting for deliverance from political oppression. Others long for freedom from their addiction. Some seek Him desiring justice in the face of oppression. Others want validation of their political, sexual, economic, or ideological cause.

Seeking Jesus for the wrong reasons is hardly new; people have been doing it ever since He entered this world in human flesh. In fact, some did it even before He arrived! The ancestors of the people pursuing Him in this passage had been longing for the promised Messiah for centuries, but essentially for all the wrong reasons. So it came as no surprise to Jesus that those who pursued Him to Capernaum came for essentially economic reasons. Under the iron boot of Rome, life was hard and the economy bad. A Messiah who appeared to offer a free lunch program was worth seeking!



by Rock Dillaman

Now make no mistake, Jesus cares deeply about our struggles and our pains in this hard, fallen creation. He cares deeply about justice, the poor, human dignity, the lonely, and the sick.

His is the greatest heart in the universe. And He's more than able to address our needs. He's unrivaled as a counselor, a healer, a liberator, a restorer, a provider, a manager, a protector, and a friend! But He's also unrivaled as a Savior! He longs to do more than cosmetic surgery on a body that is still dying! He longs to give us life. He wants to set us free from the powers of sin and death that lie behind the pains we face in this world. He wants to deal with causes, not just symptoms; to deal with our greatest need, not just our felt needs. He wants to change our hearts, not just our circumstances.

PRAYER SUGGESTION

Father, I easily focus on the lesser needs of life while neglecting my greatest need—a growing relationship with You that will guide and empower me as I navigate through this hard world. Help me to discern what matters most and to seek Jesus above all else. Amen.

NOTES

The Good Shepherd

READ

John 10:1 – 21

KEY VERSE

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.” ... “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep, and my sheep know me.” (JOHN 10:11 AND 4)

DEVOTIONAL

In this passage, Jesus uses a simple but profound metaphor to describe His relationship to us—His “sheep.” In Christ’s description, He juxtaposes the thief and the mere hired hand with the good shepherd. A good shepherd cares for his sheep; he is legitimately the leader (enters at the gate); he never abandons his sheep (the hired hand runs away); and he sacrifices himself for his sheep’s safety (he faces the wolf and danger).

Sheep are not smart animals. They need a good shepherd, someone they can trust will take care of them and not lead them off a cliff. We are helpless, sinful creatures, as helpless as dumb sheep, and we desperately need a good shepherd. We tend to wander, to follow a path unknown to us, not recognizing any danger that may be on that path. Christ promises to guide us back to safety, protecting us from harm.

How does He do that? He calls to us, He speaks to us, but we need to recognize His voice. If we belong to Christ, we can hear His voice guiding our steps, protecting us from the wrong path.



by Priscilla Ortliip

Do you listen for His voice? We can often bring so many requests to Christ in prayer, we forget to listen for His voice. It seems so simple, it can be hard to fathom. Christ calls us, He leads us, and all we have to do is listen and follow. Listen, follow, and trust.

PRAYER SUGGESTION

Heavenly Father, I thank You that You know me better than I know myself. I thank You that You are trustworthy—that You are my Good Shepherd. Help quiet my thoughts that I may be still and listen for Your voice. Help me to trust Your perfect love and follow You readily. Show me what I need to change so I may receive Your guidance and love the path that follows behind You.

NOTES

Do You Believe?

READ

John 11:25 – 44

KEY VERSE

“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?’” (JOHN 11:25-26)

DEVOTIONAL

Jesus had just arrived to support his friends, Mary and Martha, in Bethany. The two sisters had sent word for Jesus to come immediately because their brother Lazarus was very ill. When Jesus arrived, they had already buried Lazarus and he had been in the tomb for four days. The neighborhood was in mourning for their loss.

Jesus loved the three siblings and when Martha ran to meet Him, He immediately brought her truth, knowing her pain.

“I am the Resurrection

(the living being Who comes back to life after death)

And the Life (a vital functioning being)

The one who believes in me will live, even though they die

(pass from physical life)

And whoever lives by believing in me will never die

(pass out of existence).”

And then, He asks a question.

“Do you believe this?”



by Leslie Rich

Jesus was preparing Mary for the amazing miracle yet to occur. Lazarus was to be reunited with his physical body. He was also asking Martha if she believed the deeper truth.

Did she believe that He was her personal resurrection? Her life-giver? Her eternal life?

The question He asked His friend that day is still our question.

Do you believe this? Do I? Do we believe that Jesus died and conquered death once and for all so that our spirits may live forever with Him? To live as vital, functioning beings for all eternity?

PRAYER SUGGESTION

Lord Jesus, I believe. I believe that Your resurrection power is available to me, today and every day. Not only did You die that I may have life eternal, but You died so that I may walk with You each and every day. Enable me, Lord, to live according to this truth: the truth that death is conquered. And help me to rejoice as I learn to walk closer and more in tune with You.

NOTES

Love One Another

READ

1 John 3:11 – 24

KEY VERSE

“Dear children, let’s not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions. Our actions will show that we belong to the truth, so we will be confident when we stand before God.”

(1 JOHN 3:18-19 NLT)

DEVOTIONAL

I think we have all heard the phrase—talk is cheap. I once read a more complete version: “talk is cheap, words are plentiful, deeds are precious.” Can you think of a time when you faced a friend who talked about beliefs, feelings, or even facts—but behaved differently? How did you feel about them?

This is an area of my life that I work to keep in balance. Do my actions represent my talk? This isn’t always easy.

In John 13:34-45, as Jesus sits with 12 of his closest friends and disciples, He turns and offers a new standard— *“So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”*

Jesus speaks these words the evening before His crucifixion. Jesus didn’t merely state His love for the disciples and us—



by Scott Wakeley

He showed us His love. The writer of our scripture today also speaks of having compassion for those in need. Compassion must stir our hearts into action.

The writer also suggests at least twice that this love we show others and the compassion we have for others demonstrates our love and obedience to God.

PRAYER SUGGESTION

Lord Jesus, thank You for stepping down from heaven to show me Your love. Thank You for loving me with Your actions—Your life. Please strengthen me today to love those You have put around me. Help my actions to speak love to those closest to me—my family, my friends, my co-workers, strangers...and even those who are not kind to me. God help my deeds to be precious to You and others. Amen.

NOTES

And Now We Have Hope

READ

Romans 5

KEY VERSE

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.” (ROMANS 5:1-3)

DEVOTIONAL

Your mom is sick in the hospital and the doctors aren’t sure what’s wrong with her. They tell you that they will be running tests and depending on the outcome, they will then decide on the treatment. The doctors give you hope—they will figure out what’s wrong with your mom and will be able to fix her.

We were all once hopeless. Our sin problem was not fixable by any human. We stood no chance of ever having a right relationship with God, but then Jesus stepped in. He took care of the truly hopeless situation we faced, and now nothing else really matters.



by Gwen Kelley

No matter what comes our way, there is no longer any such thing as a hopeless situation. In Jesus there is always hope. God has promised to help us through our tough times on earth. And if that weren't enough, God has promised to take us to heaven where even the toughest of times will be forgotten. Look to Jesus; He is offering true hope.

PRAYER SUGGESTION

Heavenly Father, there is nothing we can do to earn Your love. In Jesus You offer us the hope we do not deserve. Help us to hold on to the hope You offer us in Your Son. When doubt and hopelessness begin to enter our minds, point us back to Your Word where we find true peace and comfort no matter what the situation. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

NOTES

Slaves to Righteousness

READ

Romans 6:1 – 23

KEY VERSE

“Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin which leads to death, or to obedience which leads to righteousness. But thanks be to God you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.” (ROMANS 6:15-18)

DEVOTIONAL

- The question raised here comes from those who are afraid the doctrine of justification by faith alone will remove all moral restraint. Paul rejects such a suggestion and shows that Christians do not throw morality to the winds. To the contrary, they exchange sin for righteousness as their master.
- The contrast between sin and obedience suggests that sin is, by nature, disobedience to God.
- They wholeheartedly obeyed. Christian obedience is not forced or legalistic, but willingly given.
- They were now slaves to righteousness. Christians have changed masters. Whereas they were formerly slaves to sin, now they become slaves (willing servants) to righteousness.

As I look at this section of Romans it’s really easy for me to look at my own life for a clear example of what God’s gift can do when



by Donald Tucker

it's accepted and applied. Having been a slave to sin for many years, I only wonder how many others are out there right now who don't even realize that the chains of slavery that hold them captive can easily be removed and that freedom is only a choice away. Slavery to sin only leads to death; slavery to God produces holiness. The end of the process is eternal life. Choose this day to accept the free gift of salvation that comes when you exchange your sin stained life for a life of righteousness.

PRAYER SUGGESTION

Dear Heavenly Father, I want to thank You for giving me the courage to make a choice to change my life. Because of Your sacrifice on the cross I can now live a life of righteousness, free of the chains of sin that held me captive for so many years. As people look on me today let them see the transforming power of Christ in me. No man could do that, only You can. Let me be a light that can shine in places of darkness, so Your glory can be witnessed by others that are still slaves to sin.

NOTES

It's Not in My Nature

READ

Romans 8:1 – 17

KEY VERSE

“For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’” (ROMANS 8:14-15)

DEVOTIONAL

I remember a funny story about an old friend's Rottweiler. This dog had a very menacing appearance and would cause the bravest individual to approach with extreme caution. The breed is known for its character trait of being courageous and bold. One day while walking his dog, a much smaller dog approached my friend's dog. The smaller dog began barking and showing his teeth to the Rottweiler. The Rottweiler was so afraid of the smaller animal, he caused my friend to fall as he ran away from the little terror! Despite being bred for qualities like “boldness” and “courage,” the Rottweiler did not present those qualities when being presented with the small challenge. I would say that it was not in his nature.

In this passage of scripture, we understand that the human nature is comfortable with sin. Human nature is selfish, self serving, and manipulative. The character traits of our human nature are not pleasing to God. Something would have to change in our human nature that would allow God to receive us. God loves us



by Sheldon Williams

unconditionally but requires a change in behavior. We are not obligated to remain as servants to our human nature. We have the opportunity to be set free from our oppressive sinful nature through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and to be accepted into God's family as His children. We can overcome the attractions to sin that our human nature wants to pursue by accepting Jesus Christ into our lives. There is a newness of life that exists when people allow Christ into their life. The previous human nature is no longer in control. The new life in Christ Jesus allows us the opportunity to change all of those destructive and harmful character traits that we once possessed. Once we have conquered our attraction to sin, we can proclaim with boldness, "It's not in my nature."

PRAYER SUGGESTION

Holy Spirit, show me any remnant of my old human nature. Give me the strength to address the areas of my life that keep me from experiencing freedom in Christ.

NOTES

Christ the First Fruit

READ

1 Corinthians 15

KEY VERSE

“If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” (1 CORINTHIANS 15:19-20)

DEVOTIONAL

I’m a history buff and as such, I enjoy reading biographies, the stories of great men and women whose lives have influenced and shaped—for better or for worse—the world in which they lived. In a normal biography, the story draws to a close with the death of the prominent person in question, often followed by an epilogue reflecting on the long-term impact his/her life has made on others.

In this great resurrection chapter, 1 Corinthians 15, Paul reminds us, in no uncertain terms, that the “biography” of Jesus is no ordinary story. Unlike every other moral or religious leader before or since, Jesus’ story doesn’t draw to a close with His death on a cross. For the “last enemy” of mankind—death—couldn’t hold Him. Jesus conquered death—He is risen!

But the news gets even better. In His resurrection, Jesus has become the firstfruits of new resurrection life for all those who belong to Him. Growing up we had a vegetable garden in the back yard, and every summer, the first ear of sweet corn, or the first juicy

red tomato was celebrated. In a very tangible way each spoke of the promise of so much more to come. So it is with the resurrection of Jesus. His victory over death resounds with the promise of many more who will, like Him, put on immortality. Jesus' resurrection has paved the way for His story to become our story.



by Blaine Workman

PRAYER SUGGESTION

Father, today I thank You that my hope for all eternity is not based on wishful thinking or the imaginations of men. Rather, my hope rests on the solid foundation of the resurrection of Jesus. Because He is the firstfruit of resurrection life, I know that I, too, will one day put on immortality. Help me to walk today as one who has been set free from the fear of death. And help me to set my hope not in this life but in eternity. Amen.

NOTES

Christ's Resurrection Power

READ

Ephesians 1

KEY VERSE

"All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ." (EPHESIANS 1:3)

DEVOTIONAL

When I think about Christ's resurrection power in our lives, I am often reminded it has nothing to do with us. Verse 3 points out that we are blessed with every spiritual blessing because we are united with Christ. I am aware of the depth of my sin and the ways that I fall short of God's glory. So to imagine for a minute that Christ could come and save me by His death and resurrection reminds me of His power and puts me in awe of Him.

This Easter I think that is the best place to be: standing in awe of my Savior. I don't do it often enough. Verses 3–14 describe what God gives us all because we are united with Christ. Verse 5 says He decided in advance to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ. This is what He wanted to do and it gave Him great pleasure.



by Krista Mueller

To think that God takes great pleasure in adopting me into His family makes my heart overflow with awe. I do not fully understand what it means to be adopted by God, but I am so thankful that He chose me.

PRAYER SUGGESTION

Lord, I praise You for Your incredible mercy to me in Christ. I am thankful for the inexhaustible grace You have lavished upon me. I praise You God that I can know You as “God and Father.” Lord, I pray that I would grow to know “God and Father” more intimately and grow to know the certainty and security of my hope. I thank You for making a plan to save and adopt me into Your family.

NOTES

Home Sweet Home

READ

Philippians 3

KEY VERSE

“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body.” (PHILIPPIANS 3:20-21)

DEVOTIONAL

Home sweet Home. There’s no place like home. It’s so refreshing when we’ve have been away to return home. Even if we’ve been on vacation we can’t wait to sleep in our own beds.

Our key verse makes it clear our home is not in this world—even though we currently live here. Our eternal home is heaven. No matter how perfect our earthly home, it will not compare to our heavenly home. Not when you take into consideration those golden streets, gates of pearl, the presence of Jesus, and all those other upgrades! I honestly look forward to living somewhere that doesn’t require ongoing maintenance and a fresh coat of paint. And imagine traveling about with no need to avoid potholes and black ice!

The knowledge of our future home should have a profound impact on how we live today. The end we envision for ourselves should shape our journey. We often get wrapped up in the world around us—our desires, our ambitions, our “needs.” But when we come to

our senses, we recognize the best things in life aren't things. We live differently; we store up treasures in heaven.



by Donald Tucker

Like a child eagerly waiting for daddy to come home from work, we eagerly wait for the return of Christ. There will come a day when we will be transformed by the Holy Spirit and receive our resurrection body—similar to the one Jesus possesses. That new body will never know pain, weakness, sickness, or disease. That new body will not wear out and will be suited to appear before the Lord. I have often heard it compared to a caterpillar being transformed into a butterfly. We've all watched reality shows where people undergo complete makeovers. But in reality that's nothing compared to the makeover in store for us! Whatever defect or physical limitation we may have here on earth will be gone. How glorious will that be?! Imagine what it will be like to arrive "home."

PRAYER SUGGESTION

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for my mansion, and thank You for the place You've prepared for me after I leave this world. Thank You for showing me how to take my faith out of the hands of men and put it in Your hands. Thank You, Father, for showing me how to live a holy life in a corrupt world.

NOTES

Full of Power

READ

Colossians 2:9 – 15

KEY VERSE

“For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority.” (COLOSSIANS 2:9-10)

DEVOTIONAL

As I read God’s word, I often notice how a particular word of a verse may change based on the version of translation. For instance, a word in the King James Version may be substituted by another word in the New Living Translation. The New International Version may have a word that is different than the New American Standard Version. When these word variations occur, it is sometimes necessary to research the meaning in the original text. For Old Testament scriptures, that would be Hebrew. In the New Testament, it would be Greek. Although the words may be different, the underlying meaning doesn’t change.

In this passage of scripture the word “fullness” was not substituted despite the different translations. The writer was affirming that our Savior did not forfeit His Godly placement when He arrived here on Earth. He demonstrated that it was totally possible to possess the power of God within human existence. His willingness to be sacrificed paved the way for us to be whole again. That wholeness is the ability to overcome the challenges that human nature brings.



by Sheldon Williams

We are able to be spiritually transformed because of the power of God that can overcome any of our human struggles. Without Christ, many people feel empty or defeated. There are many negative spiritual influences that can impact a person's life. Succumbing to these influences places a person in a position of disadvantage. We gain the victory over these spiritual influences when we allow the power of God to work through us. That power was given to us by the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ. The only way to be full of the power of God is to fully accept Jesus Christ as Savior, and allow Him to have the authority over our lives. The love of God draws us, but it is the power of God that keeps us.

PRAYER SUGGESTION

Holy Spirit, show me areas of my life where I have not allowed the power of God to work. Father, I pray for Your power to help me with these areas and that I would be filled with Your Holy Spirit.

NOTES

Pick Up Your Cross

READ

Matthew 16:21 – 28

KEY VERSE

“What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?”

(MATTHEW 16:26)

DEVOTIONAL

Jesus predicted His suffering and death to His disciples, and it made them uncomfortable. Peter tried to talk Jesus out of such foolish talk, only to be rebuked by Jesus for not having the things of God on his mind. Why did Peter try to talk Jesus out of this path of suffering? Perhaps Peter knew that if Jesus was to suffer as part of His destiny, then suffering would be part of Peter’s as well. Jesus went on to make it clear that His followers must actively seek this process by denying self, picking up their cross, and following after Him.

Picking up your cross is not just doing a job you don’t want to do or willingly enduring some temporary discomfort or inconvenience. It is denying the very essence of the life that you love so much, so you find the life that God intends. This requires faith, for as you give God your life to be invested, expressed, and lived out as He chooses, you must trust that it is better than the life you could fashion or choose—in the long run. In the short run, it will involve denying some of your first impulses and natural tendencies to do your thing in the way you would like it done.



by John Stanko

Jesus came to give you life in abundance, and He knows the exact path you need to take to obtain that life. Do you trust Him to fulfill this life promise? Are you ready to subject your first impulses to the will of the Master? Are you willing to do what is counterintuitive to your carnal nature and follow Jesus to the cross? The good news is that the cross is not the end but the means to the end, and the end is glorious and eternal. As you take this road to resurrection, the highway's name is the cross, but the destination's name is resurrection. Don't take any shortcuts and you will certainly arrive and find the life that you ultimately desire, the life God has in store for you.

PRAYER SUGGESTION

Lord, I decide today and every day to pick up my cross and follow You. I want to save my life, and that means I must lose some of it in the death of the cross so I can inherit abundant life for all eternity. I accept Your plan for my life and I eagerly follow You on this road to resurrection.

NOTES

Imperfect Intimacy

READ

Matthew 17:1 – 13

KEY VERSE

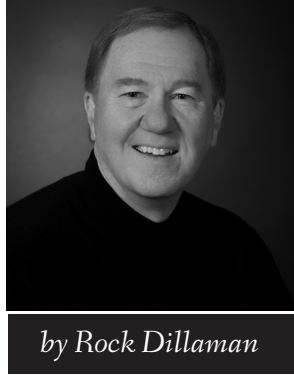
“Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves.”

(MATTHEW 17:1)

DEVOTIONAL

Years ago I heard a statement that has stuck to my soul; one consisting of equal parts assurance and incentive. “Jesus has no favorites, but He does have His intimates.” Jesus has no favorites because God’s no respecter of persons. The ground is level at the foot of the cross. We all come to Him in sin, pride, and brokenness. Anyone who recognizes that could never honestly suggest God should prefer them over another believer! Beyond that, God’s love is perfect and complete. He doesn’t exercise a lesser love towards some and a greater love towards others. Every child of God is the recipient of His full and perfect love—no matter their struggles.

But Jesus does have intimates! There are some who intentionally draw closer to Him, hungry for more intimacy; eager to know Him better. While some disciples allow themselves to get caught up in the tyranny of the urgent, leaving little time for conscious thought about Jesus and communication with Him, others devote themselves to what is truly important. They make prayer, Word, and worship a priority. They hunger; and as Jesus promised they are filled. What does this have to do with the Transfiguration?



by Rock Dillaman

Everything. Even our little ones know Jesus had twelve disciples, but only three were invited to this awesome, holy occasion—Peter, James, and John, his brother—three men frequently seen digging deeper where Jesus was concerned. One would even walk on water.

Now Jesus didn't love these three more than the others. And they weren't inherently better men or above error. That's evidenced in the fact they wanted to build shrines and elevate Moses and Elijah to Jesus status. But they apparently sought Him more diligently than others. And they were rewarded, for God rewards those who seek Him. Not in the sense that he dispenses more trinkets, but in the sense that they take hold of more of the treasures available to any and all disciples. While some picked little samples from the buffet of divine blessing they filled their plates!

PRAYER SUGGESTION

Lord, my heart is easily distracted. I give time to what appears urgent but frequently neglect what is really important. I'm encouraged You have no favorites, but help me to become one of Your intimates. Amen.

NOTES

Palm Sunday

READ

Matthew 21:1 – 11

KEY VERSE

“Most of the crowd spread their garments on the road ahead of Him, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Jesus was in the center of the procession, and the people all around Him were shouting, ‘Praise God for the Son of David! Blessings on the One who comes in the name of The Lord! Praise God in the highest heaven!’” (MATTHEW 21:8-9 NLT)

DEVOTIONAL

I think I should let you know, I am not a fan of parades—maybe it’s a patience thing, maybe I didn’t get candy from a float or maybe I got hit. How about you? Are you a fan of parades, cheering, waving, and eagerly waiting for the next float or band or celebrity? There can be an excitement and energy.

As I read through the New Testament, it seems that Jesus frequently had a crowd around, anxious listeners, folks waiting to be healed...and some skeptics (Pharisees). But, in today’s reading He is the center of a parade. People gathered to shout and cheer. They were excited and energetic—and they were doing things that showed honor.

It was more than a parade. It was a celebration of Jesus. I think that would be a parade I could love. How about you?



by Scott Wakeley

I wonder if Jesus were to ride into your community what the response would be? Would people recognize Jesus? Would people jump for the chance to worship? Would they hope for free candy or would they celebrate the King, Savior, Healer, Shepherd, Lord?

The good news is that this parade happens today. Jesus is here. Today we can worship Him for who He is and what He has done.

PRAYER SUGGESTION

Dear Gracious God, thank You for Jesus. Thank You for Your love, Jesus. I worship You, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Almighty God, Prince of Peace, Loving Shepherd. Holy Spirit, help me to always choose worship. Amen.

NOTES

The Parable of the Tenants

READ

Matthew 21:33 – 46

KEY VERSE

“He will bring those wretches to a wretched end.” (MATTHEW 21:41A)

DEVOTIONAL

What a sad story! It is not with delight that Christ chooses to judge the wicked. This is a story of the unfathomable kindness and patience of our God even for those who hate Him. It is also a story of His terrible and fierce judgment.

In this story Christ gives no opportunity for any interpretation that the leaders of Israel were ignorant or ill-informed about who Christ was and the significance of His presence. Verses 38-39 clearly reveal the hearts of the Pharisees and chief priests. They identified Jesus as the Son of God and deliberately chose to kill Him and usurp the power and honor of God for themselves.

It is interesting that the Lord allowed the guilty husbandmen to pronounce judgment on themselves. In verse 40 Christ asks, *“What will the owner of the vineyard do to those tenants?”* Their reply: *“He will bring those wretches to a wretched end.”*

The Pharisees and chief priests knew that Christ was speaking of them when He told this parable as revealed in verse 45. Yet they did not choose to repent but instead looked for a way to arrest Him.



by Glenn Hanna

The lesson here is that Christ is long-suffering and kind. He does not quickly judge us for our sin. He frequently bears with our stubborn opposition to His power and majesty for far longer than seems reasonable to the human mind. But His judgment will come. It will be harsh and final.

2 Corinthians 5:10 – 11 says, *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.”*

PRAYER SUGGESTION

Oh Lord, help us to not make friends with our sin and pride. Teach us to confess our sin to You and repent quickly, for the price of our stubbornness is far too dear for us to pay.

NOTES

To Serve or Not to Serve

READ

Mark 10:35 – 45

KEY VERSE

“Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” (MARK 10:43-45)

DEVOTIONAL

Has anyone ever asked you to do a favor for them, but they want you to say “yes” to them before they voice their request? Right away red flags go up because you wonder if they have an ulterior motive. I sort of feel the same way about James and John when they came to Jesus with their request. But He didn’t have to wonder if they had an ulterior motive! He knew their hearts. They were concerned about their status, their recognition, their high place in the Kingdom. Basically they were saying, “Jesus, give us the best seats in the house. We don’t care where anyone else sits!”

God doesn’t call us to sit in high places. He calls us to serve. If anyone deserves to be served it is our LORD! He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords! Jesus came to earth and healed the sick, fed the hungry, gave sight to the blind, and gave His life so we sinners could have life. In it all, Jesus never sought to exalt Himself. Every miracle He performed put others first and brought glory to God. Just like the disciples, we have a lot to learn from His example.



by Gwen Kelley

We please God when we humble ourselves and put others first. What are some ways you can put others first? What have you done in the past month to serve someone else? The easiest way to know if you're a true servant is by how you react when people treat you like one!

PRAYER SUGGESTION

Dear Heavenly Father, You sent Your Son to be a servant to us all. It didn't matter to Him what sin the person committed, what disease he had, how bad the person smelled or looked. Nothing was beneath Him. Please help us to be an unconditional servant. Help us to look below the skin of the person and look at his heart. Help us to remember to put God first, others second, and ourselves third. In Jesus' name, amen.

NOTES

A Study in Contrasts

READ

Luke 7:36 – 50

KEY VERSE

“When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.” (LUKE 7:37-38)

DEVOTIONAL

The scripture makes it clear that this woman was a sinner. Bible scholars even say she was a harlot. We are not sure how she got into the dinner party. But there she was. Maybe she expected that one of the servants would wash the feet of Jesus, and then she would use her valuable perfume to anoint. But no one had washed His feet. She knew she was a sinner and her humble act of pouring the oil over the feet of Jesus and wiping them with her hair was an act of worship. I’m sure she saw the look of disdain in Simon’s eyes, but her worship was too important for her to care.

On the other hand, Simon was a Pharisee—a self-righteous Pharisee. Did you note that instead of allowing Jesus to judge him, he was judging Jesus? He was thinking, “If Jesus were a prophet he would know this woman was a sinner and have nothing to do with her.” Holiness is achieved by separating from sin and sinners. The Pharisees saw sin like our society sees AIDS. There is no cure. Avoid it.

The truth was Jesus not only knew the woman was a sinner, He knew what Simon was thinking. Simon wanted to keep sinners out, but Jesus wanted them in. That was bad news for Simon, but good news to the woman. The woman saw Jesus as the cure for her sin. The final verse tells us that the woman's faith saved her.



by Karen Dillaman

Can I recognize self-righteousness in my own life? Why is it that sins in the lives of others are unforgivable, but sins in my life are acceptable? Do I seek or shun sinners? How welcome are they in my church? When I see them on my street? Do I have compassion for the unlovely? Or do I figure they need to pick themselves up by the bootstraps and be like me?

Can I worship like this woman, recognizing the magnitude of my sin? Today, I worship at His feet, not concerned with receiving anything but simply concerned with giving Him something of worth.

PRAYER SUGGESTION

Dear Jesus, as I look into the mirror that You hold up today, help me to see my sin for what it is. And then let me come with a grateful heart for what You've done to make provision for my sin.

NOTES

Trust and Obey

READ

Mark 14:12 – 26

KEY VERSE

“...Jesus sent two of them into Jerusalem with these instructions: ‘As you go into the city, a man carrying a pitcher of water will meet you. Follow Him. At the house he enters, say to the owner, “The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room where I can eat the Passover meal with my disciples?” He will take you upstairs to a large room that is already set up. That is where you should prepare our meal.’ So the two disciples went into the city and found everything just as Jesus had said, and they prepared the Passover meal there.” (MARK 14:13-16 NLT)

DEVOTIONAL

In spite of all their faults and shortcomings, I’ve always admired and appreciated how the disciples trusted and obeyed Jesus, even when it wasn’t easy for them to perceive the outcome. How could they ever imagine that Jesus would multiply a young boy’s lunch to feed more than 5,000, or that He would transform vessels of water into wine? Obedience probably wasn’t something they learned to do overnight, but they quickly came to a place where they were willing to do what Jesus asked of them without questioning His motives or methods.

When Jesus told two of His disciples that as they entered the city a man would find them and provide a room that had been set-up to prepare the Passover feast, they didn’t question Him because they were well-trained by that point to trust and believe that the things



by George Furman

He said would come to pass. Similarly in chapter eleven, Jesus sent two of His disciples into a village where they would see a donkey's colt and bring it back without interference from anyone. These guys must've enjoyed running errands for Jesus because they experienced the supernatural and always found things just as Jesus said they would. They completely trusted Him—and that led to a track record of obedience.

Later, as Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with His friends, He spoke of a “new” covenant that could only be possible because of the blood He was about to spill. We must remember that a covenant is a two-way agreement. For His part, Jesus provided the sacrifice and the forgiveness of sins; His followers must trust Him and obey Him. Faith and trust without obedience is nothing more than lip-service and a charade, and God is not obligated to accept that.

Just like the disciples, we must be committed to not only hearing what Jesus says, but we must also be willing to do what He says. Jesus said obedience is the proof that will separate His true followers from the pretenders.

PRAYER SUGGESTION

Dear God, reveal areas of my life that You need to bring under total submission to You. I desire to commit to a lifetime of liberating obedience to You and Your word.

NOTES

Gethsemane

READ

Mark 14:32 – 51

KEY VERSE

“They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to His disciples, ‘Sit here while I pray.’ He took Peter, James and John along with Him, and He began to be deeply distressed and troubled. ‘My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,’ He said to them. ‘Stay here and keep watch.’ Going a little farther, He fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from Him.”

(MARK 14: 32-35)

DEVOTIONAL

Have you been given a really tough assignment? One that is so overwhelming and burdensome that you have no answer other than to pray? Then this passage offers you good news! You have been placed in a divine spot where God wants to draw you even nearer to Him so you can experience His peace and then return to the challenge walking in His power and confidence.

Notice how carefully Jesus created the atmosphere to have this divine encounter.

- 1) He went away to a garden to avoid distractions.
- 2) He asked others to be nearby praying and keeping watch.
- 3) He went deeper into the garden, laid down in humility, and shared His heart with God.

- 4) God answered by giving Him the strength to stay focused on the cross and not short circuit the greater plan of eternity by running away or calling on legions of angels to fight for Him. God gave Him PEACE.



by Ken Turnbull

So what is your divine assignment for this hour?

Where is your garden and who have you asked to pray nearby?

PRAYER SUGGESTION

Lord, I pray You would guide each of us to our private garden to lay down our burdens and receive Your personalized care. I pray that You help each of us identify those You desire to be praying for us and protecting our safe place with You. Amen.

NOTES

Peter Misses the Promise

READ

Mark 14:27 – 31

KEY VERSE

“But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.” Peter declared, “Even if all fall away, I will not.” (MARK 14:28-29)

DEVOTIONAL

This passage tells the story of Peter’s impassioned claim to stand by Christ, no matter what. That he, Peter, would never deny Christ—which countered what Christ had just described to him and the disciples about what was to come.

I think we can all place ourselves in Peter’s shoes, wanting to declare our undying, unfailing allegiance to our Lord and Savior. I love that we have this description of Peter because it lets us be human and sinful, right in front of Christ—and still not be rejected by Him. Indeed Christ is patient but instructive, predicting to Peter—who still insisted he would remain loyal—that he would deny Christ before the cock would crow twice.

This passage touches all of us in a very human (and sinful) place. We think a great deal of our capacity to stand up for our beliefs; we let our feelings speak for us, often outside of reason and spiritual discernment. On the one hand, we love Peter for his passion; but on the other hand, we see in him our own struggle: not listening to God but positioning ourselves as understanding fully before we even have a clue. This is about misguided passion and pride.



by Priscilla Ortliip

How puny our understanding is! How awesome is Christ's knowledge of who we are and more—His forgiveness when we position ourselves foolishly. Don't let Peter's denial blur what Christ's whole point was: that His "sheep" would scatter, but He would then go ahead of His "sheep" into Galilee to receive them there. There is a promise in His words—and Peter misses it. Christ knew what was to come, what pain He would face, even the scattering of His followers. And yet He would still be there for His disciples and ultimately for us all.

Do you push past God and miss the promise He has? Are you like Peter, focusing on your righteous love for God yet struggling with the truth that you need Christ every moment in ways you cannot imagine?

PRAYER SUGGESTION

Father, forgive me for assuming that my love for You is greater than Your knowledge and truth. You are the One to show me, teach me, and love me—despite myself. Help me to listen, discern Your words, and face my limitations and my desperate need for You.

NOTES

He Remained Silent

READ

Matthew 26:57 – 68

KEY VERSE

“Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, ‘Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?’ But Jesus remained silent.” (MATTHEW 26:62-63)

DEVOTIONAL

Jesus was betrayed by His closest brother, His disciple, one who walked with him daily. They ate their meals together, slept together, prayed together, played together, and laughed together. And yet, here He is arrested and judged with only false witnesses to keep Him captive. Was Jesus tempted to strike out? In His hurt, fatigue, and betrayal, did He call angels to deliver Him? No, He was a meek lamb led to slaughter.

But even more, when brought before the high priest, HE REMAINED SILENT! How often have you found yourself in one of these positions? Oh, maybe not in jail, maybe not on trial, but surely we have all faced betrayal or been lied against or even been misunderstood. And have you been able to remain silent? To allow our heavenly Father to have His perfect plan come to fruition?

I confess I have not. I take every opportunity to straighten the record. I want my side to be heard because most times, my side is the truth! When I look at my Savior, I am convicted to rely less on my own words and more on His wisdom.



by Leslie Rich

PRAYER SUGGESTION

Dearest Savior, please send Your Holy Spirit to direct and guide my speech and control my words. I confess my own stubborn nature wants to win every argument, always placing myself in the best light. Forgive me, God, and allow me to listen for direction, to speak as needed but to remain silent as You guide.

NOTES

Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani?

READ

Matthew 27:32 – 54

KEY VERSE

“About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, Lama sabachthani?’ (which means) ‘My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?’” (MATTHEW 27:46)

DEVOTIONAL

The crucifixion of Jesus is probably the most misunderstood event in the history of the world. WHY would the Creator of the world (who supposedly loves His Son) arrange for Him to die the most gruesome death known to man?

Jesus even asks of God the Father, while He’s in the garden of Gethsemane, not once but TWICE, if it is at all possible for Him to NOT go to the cross then let it be so. Even while hanging from the cross He cries out, *“My God, why have you abandoned me?”*

Matthew 27: 43b makes the answer very clear. In their mocking the chief priests, teachers of the law, and elders said this:

“He trusts in God...”

Period.

Jesus had complete trust in His Father. He knew that the Father, in all of HIS infinite wisdom, had an incomprehensible reason for Him to endure the cross. Jesus may have questioned and felt isolated by His Father, but in the end He understood what that meant. He had to TRUST Him.



by Sherese McBride

To trust is to have an **assured reliance** on the character, ability, strength, or truth in someone or something. Sacrificial trust has all of the same components but there is this extra piece that is tricky: we must be able to forfeit our own will by pushing past our feelings and insecurities. This is often where the difficulty lies. Trust, such a simple word, often comes with great pain, but with God there is much to be gained.

In a world where everything is so fragile, let us never transfer our doubt and uncertainties onto the character, ability, strength, or truth of the One and True God!

PRAYER SUGGESTION

Mighty God, give me the faith to trust You with everything. I believe that You are who You say You are and I place my hope in You. Please help me in the times when my unbelief is failing me. Give me the strength to trust You with my life and with all that's happening in the world around me.

A SONG

Give me faith to trust what You say
That You're good and Your love is great
I'm broken inside I give You my life
I may be weak
But Your Spirit's strong in me
My flesh may fail
My God You never will.

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Resurrection Now!

READ

Mark 16 and Matthew 28

KEY VERSE

“And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.” (MARK 16:17-18)

DEVOTIONAL

The disciples were surprised by Jesus’ resurrection. Even though He had tried to tell them about His death and resurrection, their thinking and assumptions of what God would and would not do prevented them from seeing it clearly until it happened. Even then, some of them did not believe until they saw for themselves.

The resurrection was always Jesus’ goal. Through His cross, He gained our forgiveness. Through His resurrection, He gained us the right to enjoy that forgiveness for all eternity. What’s more, He has given us His Holy Spirit as a pledge of the good things to come, the resurrection life we will all share through Christ.

Think of it—you will live forever with Him, yet the benefits of that truth begin now. You have the same Spirit living in you that raised Christ from the dead, and Paul said that Spirit quickens your mortal body right here, right now. If God can raise the dead, then He can



by John Stanko

do anything and that includes anything in and through you! If God can raise the dead, He can heal cancer. If God can raise the dead, He can speak through you to others. If God can raise the dead, He can provide for you all you need to do His will in miraculous fashion.

Yes, the resurrection truly is the good news. But are you living in the full benefits of this resurrection power? God is in you, but are you drawing on the fullness of that reality? Take time this month to assess how relevant the resurrection is to your daily living, and then ask God to help you involve resurrection power in your health, work, and relationships.

PRAYER SUGGESTION

Lord, I thank You for Your resurrection life that is available to me through faith in Christ. Not only are my sins forgiven, but I have eternal life in Him. Yet Lord, I am not making the most of this truth. Help me apply the lessons and reality of the resurrection to my daily life and walk, and may the resurrection not just be a historical fact but a living reality in all that I say and do.

NOTES

He Is Risen Indeed!

READ

Luke 24:13 – 35

KEY VERSE

“And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, ‘The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon.’” (LUKE 24:33–34)

DEVOTIONAL

Here’s my prediction. As Easter approaches, a major news magazine will run with a picture of Jesus on the cover under a banner that reads something like this—“The Real Jesus”, “The Search for the Historical Jesus”, or “Jesus: What We Now Know.” Flipping to the article inside, you’ll be able to read interviews with several leading “Bible scholars” who will probably admit that a person named Jesus actually walked the earth 2000 years ago. But in the final analysis, they’ll conclude that His real significance lies, not in who He was, but rather in what people have come to believe about Him.

As a young (unbelieving) man, I thought myself too wise to believe such foolishness. Then a Christian friend challenged me to consider the resurrection. Was it history...or just another religious myth? Did Jesus really...physically...rise from the dead? And, if He did, what does that say about His claim of divinity, and, more personally, His claim of authority in my life?



by Blaine Workman

I accepted the challenge and considered the eyewitness accounts and other ancient texts and traditions. I looked at all those who claimed to have seen Jesus alive following His crucifixion, like the two we read about today. And I looked at the plausibility of alternative explanations to the Easter story.

One historical fact was impossible to ignore. Many people are willing to die for what *they believe* to be true. But how many are willing to die for what *they know* to be a lie? Jesus' disciples said Christ appeared to them **alive**—in a physical body—after His death. They knew whether this claim was true or false, and, to a man, they were willing to die for proclaiming Jesus as the Risen Lord. And die a martyr's death most of them did. They died for what they knew to be true—He is risen indeed!

We do Easter a disservice if we celebrate it merely as a religious holiday, for Easter marks the most important event in human history. No wonder the Apostle Paul could later write, “(*Jesus*) *was declared (marked out) to be Son of God in power... by His resurrection from the dead.*” (Romans 1:4)

PRAYER SUGGESTION

Father, thank You that we can gather this weekend to celebrate the resurrection of your Son—not just as a life-giving spiritual belief, but as a rock-solid historical truth. Help me to be “steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (Romans 15:58)...in light of the truth that He is risen!

Too Good to Be True

READ

Luke 24:36 – 49

KEY VERSE

“They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?”...He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” (LUKE 24:37-38; 44)

DEVOTIONAL

Why did the disciples struggle with disbelief? They were in the moment with Christ, seeing Him but not believing their eyes. Yet Christ had predicted His death and resurrection. What was wrong with the disciples that they could not believe what their eyes told them, even after all their experiences with Christ?

Maybe it was “too good to be true.” Maybe the disciples were still reeling from the loss of Christ, their Master and Friend, and were taken by surprise, despite Christ’s predictions. But more, to feel the loss and destruction (because of His crucifixion) of what they had believed and experienced with Christ for those years, must have shaken their beliefs. The Son of Man was tortured and killed. In their human thinking, all they knew, all they believed, was over. They had settled into grieving not only Christ’s death but the death of all He had taught them. Things did not look good.



by Priscilla Ortliip

The surprise of Christ's appearance challenged their resigned minds—they were not yet filled with the Holy Spirit. His presence confronted their feelings of sadness and loss. They apparently had not been fully on board with Christ's prediction of His resurrection—it was too good to be true. And by thinking Christ's words were simply not possible, they struggled to believe the living Son of God standing right in front of them!

Do you dummy-down what Christ can do in your life because of disbelief? Do you assume you are not significant enough to warrant a miracle—that God wouldn't bother with you? I wonder how many signs of God's love we reject before He even gets to show us! We should rejoice in not only our salvation through His death and resurrection but in every way He wants to give us good things.

PRAYER SUGGESTION

Heavenly Father, I thank You for the sacrifice of Christ for the remission of my sins. I believe He died to save me. O Lord, help me in my unbelief in living my life as Your child. May I rejoice daily in the miracles You have for me—even the ones “too good to be true.” Let me speak of the joy I have in loving and trusting You.

NOTES

Reinstating Peter

READ

John 21

KEY VERSE

“Simon Peter said, ‘I’m going fishing.’ ‘We’ll come too,’ they all said. So they went out in the boat, but they caught nothing all night.”

(JOHN 21:3 NLT)

DEVOTIONAL

Sometimes I think that Peter would have starved to death if Jesus had let him stay a fisherman! Peter seemed to be comfortable fishing. Maybe it was therapy, a place where he could think and sort out life and what was going on.

Sometimes I need a long drive to clear things. How about you? Do you have a hobby or habit that you drift comfortably to when life seems to be getting away from you? Maybe we do these things because we feel safe.

We find Peter at his old job, fishing. Jesus finds Peter. This is where Jesus first found Peter. *“When Simon Peter realized what had happened, he fell to his knees before Jesus...For he was awestruck by the number of fish they had caught...Jesus replied to Simon, ‘Don’t be afraid! From now on you’ll be fishing for people!’ And as soon as they landed, they left everything and followed Jesus.”* (Luke 5:8-11 NLT)



by Scott Wakeley

Peter had followed Jesus but hit a bump in the road when he denied he knew Him. Peter's world was rocked and he needed "safe"—he thought he needed fishing.

Jesus found Peter again and lovingly drew him back. He didn't question Peter's love, but he helped Peter to understand. Jesus exposed truth and reinstated Peter—relationally and spiritually.

Sometimes my sin encourages me to make my own comfort away from Jesus, but Jesus always calls and encourages me back to Himself. He calls to you.

PRAYER SUGGESTION

Dear God, thank You for saving me and calling me Your child. Thank You for Your forgiveness. Lord, help me not to drift back into old comfortable habits. Help me to rest in You and cling to Your calling in my life. Amen.

NOTES

Ultimate Journey

READ

Acts 1:3 – 11

KEY VERSE

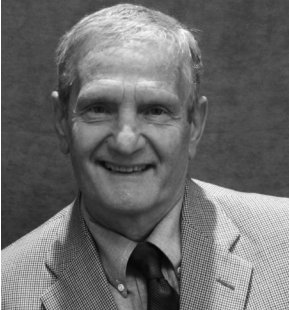
*“Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking up into the sky?
This same Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will
come back in the same way you saw him go into heaven.” (ACTS 1:11)*

DEVOTIONAL

I was searching for comforting words to share with a family who had lost a precious loved one. The story of Elisha came to mind. In the story a relationship is about to end between the young apprentice prophet who is to be separated by the death of the senior prophet. The apprentice wants to know what he can do. And the sage prophet says: *“You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if you do not see me, it shall not be so.”* (2 Kings 2:10) And Elisha is taken up by a whirlwind into heaven. Wow! What a spectacular display of a faithful, all-powerful God!

The ascension of Christ to heaven completes the will of His Father and seals mankind’s promised salvation in His resurrection. Jesus leaves his disciples in much the same manner as the prophet with the promise He will be back for them. What hope to know I am not in the dark about my future but can rejoice that He is coming back for His bride, the church! I don’t fully understand the greatness of this event, but fully accept God’s plan for me; my ultimate

journey will be to live with Him forever. Why should I doubt with such proof as in Christ's ascension? It is the completion of the ultimate journey, planned for each one that believes in Christ, to our eternal home.



by Andy Antoninka

PRAYER SUGGESTION

Lord, thank You for the ascension of the Lord Jesus, and the promise He will return for His bride. I look forward to fully experiencing God in paradise. May this promise encourage us to be His messengers of the gift of eternal life in Christ to as many as hear and accept the promise. Amen.

NOTES

The Impossibility of Death

READ

Acts 2:22 – 36

KEY VERSE

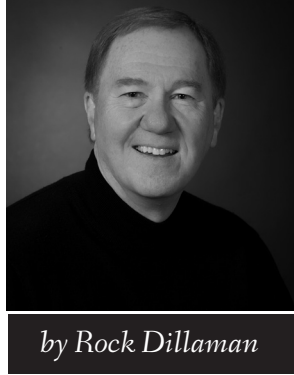
“But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.” (ACTS 2:24)

DEVOTIONAL

We have a tendency to think of physical death as being inescapable. After all, the Bible says it's appointed unto man to die, and then judgment. But death is actually very unnatural. It occurs only because it's been appointed by God as a consequence of our sin. Imagine if every evil soul that's ever rejected God were still alive today, having had thousands of years to further develop their evil!

God created our bodies in such a way that they naturally replenish themselves with new cell development. We weren't designed for death. But the change in our blood protoplasm that produces death entered Adam's body when he ate from the forbidden tree. And that poison has been passed down to all his descendants.

But Jesus was not a natural descendant of Adam! His body was specially formed by God in the womb of the Virgin Mary. And He entered the world with uncorrupted blood. Hebrews makes that clear. That's why His body suffered no decay, despite being entombed for three days without embalming. And it's also why Peter declared it was impossible for death to hold Him in its power.



by Rock Dillaman

In addition to His incorruptible blood free from the power of death, Jesus was without sin. So He was immune to the inevitable penalty of sin—physical and spiritual death.

All this to remind you when Peter said “impossible” he meant “impossible!” Satan could never have held Jesus in Hades. Hades was the place every soul went after death—before Jesus’ resurrection. The righteous waited there for their deliverance in what Jesus once described as “Abraham’s bosom.” That’s why David said God wouldn’t abandon him to Hades when he died; a statement Peter quoted in verse 27 in reference to Jesus—David’s Lord. Imagine what David and Moses and countless other righteous souls felt when Jesus appeared in Hades and led them out to their eternal home! You and I don’t have to wait for such a day. We live after the resurrection. Death means we are absent from the body but immediately present with the Lord.

PRAYER SUGGESTION

Father, I thank You that because I am in Christ and He is in me death has no eternal power over me! I pray that impossibility will inform and transform my view of the cross—and of myself as Your child. Amen.

NOTES

Refreshment for the Soul

READ

Acts 3:11 – 26

KEY VERSE

³“...that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets long ago.” (ACTS 3:20-21)

DEVOTIONAL

When Christ died, the veil to the Holy of Holies was torn which means that we who believe can now have full access to the Presence of God because He, the perfect lamb, took away our sins and made us pure. The fall took away our access to the Presence, but Christ, through His death and resurrection, restored our access! When we rest in the Presence, not in our circumstances, our status, our wealth, or anything else this world has to offer, we receive refreshment for our very soul. Easter brings us to a new sense of refreshment that those before Easter could only dream about.

Yet, sadly I fear we walk away from Easter happy because we've just celebrated what He's done, but quickly forget to allow the truth of His refreshing Presence to follow in the days after the celebration. Don't allow that to happen!

God is here, and God is with us! He desires to heal our wounds, our bodies, and our souls. He is not a passive God as we sometimes



by Marv Nelson

are passive followers. He loves us, He cares for us; even though He's seen the depths of our hearts, He loves us the same.

His plan is to restore all things, to renew all things, and to destroy the evil one and all his works. This plan then begins with our own renewal, restoration, and the destruction of the evil within us. As we end this season together do not forget to allow His Presence to sink deeply into your soul, so you can be refreshed, so you can be restored, and so He can destroy the evil within you. Seek after His Presence and ask the Holy Spirit to fill you so you can continually live in the now readily accessible Presence of the Father!

PRAYER SUGGESTION

Father, I need refreshed by Your Presence. I too readily look to my circumstances, wealth, and status (fill in the blank) and neglect to rest in Your Presence. Only You, by Your Spirit can refresh me and restore me; so Lord, give me Your Presence today. Amen.

NOTES

ADDITIONAL NOTES

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